

# The Christian News-Letter

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Edited by  
KATHLEEN BLISS

27th June, 1945

DEAR MEMBER,

Parliament has gone out in a blaze of glory, with achievements to its credit which few Parliaments have equalled. It has mobilized the nation for war without enslaving it. It has helped by its example to keep alive in Europe the faith that political freedom would return, and has exploded the myth that democracy was a synonym for indecision and incompetence. At the same time it has put on the statute book or carried to an advanced stage of preparation, legislation on many post-war issues of primary importance.

## THE SOCIAL CONSCIENCE IN WAR-TIME

The Chief Inspector of Factories remarked recently that in two wars he had seen the same phenomenon—a quickening of the public conscience on social conditions. As soon as we were well launched on this war all kinds of people began to worry about, for example, the nation's youth. Their work, health, mental well-being, morals, leisure, schooling, home conditions, all became subjects of enquiry and ultimately of action. How many books published in peace-time have been so frequently quoted in Parliament and the press, and with such deference to their authority, as "Our Towns"? Yet all but a very few of the facts in it were known before the war to social workers, medical officers of health, housing managers, church workers and others, and appeared in their reports and made no visible stir.

There are many reasons for this quickened social conscience. War is made more tolerable by aspirations after a better world, and planning for the future gives point to the struggle. A more important factor is our sense of interdependence within the nation. In time of war every man, woman and child suddenly become important to the nation and therefore to us, and anything which helps their health, efficiency or morale we are glad to see the nation supply and pay for. The losses of war make us instinctively extend greater care to every child and mother.

In the first five years of its life this Parliament produced a negligible amount of social legislation; in the second five years,

with a war on its hands, it has passed or prepared massive social measures. How has it been done? By using the principles on which the war has been conducted. In war, once the objective has been settled, the only question asked is "How?" The questions "Why?" and "What for?" are out of the picture. We have performed prodigies by technological skill and organization. We have come to believe that it is possible to organize anything if enough hard work and all the available skill are put into it. The Education Act and the preliminary work on legislation for Social Insurance show unmistakable signs that we believe that technical remedies can be provided for all society's ills.

The difference between a nation at war and a nation at peace is the difference between a machine and a human person. The contrast, which bears a good deal of examination, was put in these terms by a friend of the News-Letter who is responsible for one part of the turnover of our economy from war to peace. When the war machine begins to run down all the unanswered "why" questions will come back on us. When we have recruited our teachers and built our schools (or perhaps before, for progress in these matters is going to be slow and difficult) we shall begin asking what the content of the education is to be and what is its object. The sense which we now have that what benefits the nation as a whole benefits each of us will die away. We shall have new coals-in-the-bath stories of boys educated at exaggerated expense who could not add up, and mothers who gave the free milk to the cat, and malingerers who lived on the insurance money. We shall have to distinguish between this kind of sharp shooting and genuine criticism of measures which, however carefully designed, could only take account of what we think peace conditions will be, and will have to be changed in the light of experience.

The passing of the common danger which held us together during the war will reveal the people in the nation whose social conscience was a form of enlightened self-interest and those with a genuine desire for social justice, which they will pursue even when the interests of individuals and groups within the nation run counter to each other. It is on these last, in all parties and classes, who know that social justice is only won by struggle and sacrifice, that the nation depends as its real conscience.

## PLANNING AND POLICY-MAKING

We are frequently being told that the task of the next Parliament is to fill out and finish off the structure of social plans which the last has already erected. If the next Parliament has any such ideas it will soon run into difficulties. We need plans; but they are far easier



to conceive and to execute in a nation that is running like a machine, either because it is intent upon a single object as in war or through the false simplification of totalitarianism. Somewhere between the technical job of working out plans and the opportunism of meeting things as they come lies the statesman's art of framing and implementing a policy which can preserve the spirit of a plan and sacrifice its details in a changing situation. We must not allow ourselves to be so intent on planning that we lose the art of policy-making. Otherwise we may find that all our admirable plans may collapse because they did not reckon sufficiently with the change of attitude and temper in the nation, as well as of circumstances, in the transition between war and peace.

A friend who has had an extraordinary opportunity of seeing industry at work over a wide field in war conditions has summarized the situation we may expect as follows :—

“ Plans work best if you can ignore the human factors : we have to reckon with the fact that some of our plans may have to be drastically modified because human beings just will not do what we want them to do, and what is in the long run in their own interest. After the war, everybody ought to have a long holiday and strawberries and cream galore—we are tired enough for that. Instead we shall have to work as hard as ever, and most people will not see why. Men returning will find that their money buys very little. Our heavy industries are concentrated in pockets far away from the rest of the nation : we do not know if we do not happen to be there, what thoughts prevail. There is a bitterness among miners amounting in many cases to real hatred, which has not died down since 1926.

“ Looking ahead we must be prepared for a time, five years hence, when our wardrobes are restocked, and we have bought all or most of the things we have done without during the war. The immediate trade boom will be over and we may find ourselves in a shortage of raw materials, because we cannot pay for them. We can only pay for them by making the things which people want. If we look at industry as raw materials being converted into useful goods, the picture is of raw materials being first processed and made usable, and then passing out into a network of ever-increasing variety and complexity as they are further processed and changed and combined with other materials to make an infinity of consumer goods. The farther you get from the source the more room there is for small businesses, for men with good ideas. But you cannot have tailors without textiles : all the ideas are worth nothing unless there is a cheap and steady supply from the basic industries. The traditional boundaries between the trades (on which the structure of Trade Unionism is built) are rapidly breaking down : they flow into each

other and must be allowed to do so in order that we may make good shortages by substitute materials.

"Our difficulties are going to be great. The collapse of Germany means the disappearance of a major economy from Europe : presumably another will disappear from the Far East. What these two events mean in terms of world trade we cannot imagine."

## THE GENERAL ELECTION

The public has to choose its future House of Commons at a time of confusion. As the election campaign proceeds, no major issue takes precedence over others as presenting the nation with a clear-cut choice of alternatives. Many Christians must be asking what light their faith throws upon their choice at the polls, other than the compulsion to vote responsibly.

It is impossible to isolate the vote and make it an act of great political significance by itself. There are votes in countries where there are one-party monopolies in government. If there is no real choice between policies, that is to say no party system, the vote is an empty thing. To make an election a real choice there must be party politics. This is where, as we have already said in a previous News-Letter, Christians have failed. Among many of us party politics have been written off as "a dirty business." The dirtiness is not of their essence : a great deal of it can be cleared away. For all but the few who have to stand aside, membership of a political party is the means by which the ordinary citizen helps to present the nation with a real choice at election time. If we have not participated in other activities of citizenship and tried to acquaint ourselves with some part of the working of government, it is unlikely that we can make good this lack of experience by hard thinking on the eve of an election.

We have been warned that man's nature is such that power corrupts it insidiously and fatally. The conclusion many have drawn from this is that Christians should eschew power not only in personal dealings, but in public life. It should rather be that no man or group of men should wield power unchecked and alone. This deliberate limiting of power is embodied in our conception of His Majesty's Opposition. It is not opposition from outside the constitution, political sharp-shooting from a distance, but it is from within, and it acts responsibly, knowing that a turn of events may exchange the rôle of government and opposition overnight.

The growth of scientific progress has had an extraordinary and unnoticed effect on our relationship to our political leaders. Until the beginning of the industrial revolution and the extension of man's mastery over the physical universe, which science and



technology have given him, most of the major calamities which afflicted mankind were attributed to nature or to God. The modern attitude is to seek to lay the blame on somebody for everything that happens. There is hardly a natural calamity left which we do not think that somebody could have prevented or mitigated or cured. It is scarcely ever the scientists themselves who come in for this blame. It is the politicians, the Government, who are the guilty men. We lay upon one man a greater burden of error than a single individual can sustain. In effect, by holding him responsible for everything, we ultimately release him from responsibility for anything, for he in turn is driven to find someone else to blame. All of us share the blame in varying degrees, and none of us is effectual except as we respond to the divine forces which shape the world.

## A NEW MOVE IN INDIA

At a time when in relation to foreign affairs no policy with a clear aim and goal is being put before the people, we find that in a quarter where perhaps we should least expect it Great Britain has a clear policy and is expressing it with imagination and vigour through a man who is unmistakably a statesman.

Lord Wavell's broadcast in which he made the announcement of the new move to end the political deadlock was a masterly statement—simple, direct and sincere. He does not underestimate the frustrations which lie between him and the goal. The step which he proposes—and the main credit goes by common consent to the Viceroy himself—contains three main provisions. A new executive council is to be set up to replace the one which has done admirable work during the war. All its members, with the exception of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, will be Indians, and for the first time Finance, Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs will be in Indian hands. Members will be chosen by the Viceroy in consultation with the leaders of the main political parties. The second feature is the appointment of a High Commissioner in India to represent His Majesty's Government, as in the Dominions. Provincial self-government is to be restored, and the members of the Congress Working Committee are released from prison.

This is a transference of solid powers from Great Britain to India. The appointment of a High Commissioner removes the psychological difficulty, acutely felt in India, that the real seat of power was in Britain, 5,000 miles away. The Viceroy now becomes the head of the Indian Government and not a go-between. Instead of being released into a vacuum to begin discussions, with all the long delays and with partisans up and down the country remonstrating and demonstrating, political detainees are released into the possibility of active and extensive co-operation in the government.

The equal representation of Moslems and Hindus is already causing heart burning. Yet it is difficult to see how the claim to a permanent superiority of numbers can fail to evoke, sooner or later, from a powerful minority the counter-claim of superiority of force. An article<sup>1</sup> by Sir Frederick Puckle in the American journal *Foreign Affairs* brought to light a problem which was discussed by Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah in their talks last summer. Mr. Jinnah claimed that the Moslems were a nation. He said : " We are a nation of a hundred million, and what is more we are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architectures, names and nomenclature ; sense of value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and character, history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions. In short, we have our own distinctive outlook on and of life. By all canons of international law we are a nation."

To this Mr. Gandhi rejoined : " I can find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendants claiming to be a nation apart from the parent stock. If India was one nation before the advent of Islam, it must remain one in spite of a change of faith of a very large body of her children.

British policy has always taken the view here supported by Mr. Gandhi—that India is one nation. If she is not one, she is not two either, but twenty or thirty. If the overarching unity within which Moslems and Hindus may differ is not that of an Indian nation, what is it ? Congress claims that as a party open to all of any creed, it is or can be the unifying force in India ; but the logic of this claim is the one-party state. If there is no overarching unity implicitly accepted by all, Hindus and Moslems must carry on their relationship as foreign states and with the constant uneasy threat of war. That way there lies no relief for what certainly unites Hindu and Moslem in India to-day, their common burden of disease, famine, debt and ignorance.

A friend who was in the House of Commons when Mr. Amery made his statement, writes : " Reading the text of Mr. Amery's speech gives little idea of the atmosphere he created. There was a real concern. Of the other speakers few spoke at length ; the common denominator was the hope that India would feel she could co-operate." Thousands of people in this country echo that hope.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the *New English Weekly*, 10th May, 1945.



## **"PROSPECT FOR CHRISTENDOM" <sup>1</sup>**

**By J. H. OLDHAM**

A volume of sixteen essays by members of what has come to be known as the "Christendom Group" is from the point of view of the Christian News-Letter for several reasons a notable event.

First, it is not simply a collection of individual contributions. It expresses the common mind of a group, who for more than twenty years have wrestled together with the question of the relation of the Christian faith to society. It is probably the most thorough attempt yet made by a Christian group in Great Britain, or perhaps in any country, to state the Christian attitude to the secular order in the contemporary situation.

Secondly, the broad tendency of the volume is to confirm the "observable convergence" of view regarding the relation of Christians to secular society, to which the late Archbishop Temple drew attention in his Supplement to the Christian News-Letter (C.N-L. No. 198). What the writers are primarily and chiefly concerned to assert will find whole-hearted assent among many who have no connection with the group responsible for this volume.

Thirdly, and most important, the writers come to real grips with the question on which all hinges, whether there is an invincible faith about the ultimate truth of things, the purpose of human life, and the work and dignity of man, by committing ourselves to which we may in the end triumph over the disasters which now threaten to engulf us.

In a field so wide as that traversed by these essays there are bound to be many matters about which opinion will differ. But for those who are aware of the gravity of the present crisis in the life of mankind, and who are concerned, as we all ought to be, with the broad strategy of the Christian warfare with the forces that are driving the world to disaster, the agreements are vastly more important than the differences. In what they are most concerned to say the writers speak with a prophetic voice to our present situation. Where so much is at stake, it would be disastrous if divergent schools of Christian thought were to fall into the mistake which in the war would, as we all knew, have been the supreme folly, of allowing energy to be diverted to quarrels between allies in the presence of the enemy.

<sup>1</sup> Faber and Faber, 12s. 6d.

The book, it is true, is sometimes disappointing if the reader is looking for clear and immediate guidance in the present confused situation. The idea of natural law, which governs the outlook of the writers, is interpreted in a way that frees it from many of the difficulties that have been felt in some quarters; but it tends at many points to be conceived too statically to enable them to come to close enough grips with the actual decisions which Christians have to make, whether they like it or not, in the world as it is. Some of the essays, though by no means all, leave an impression of remoteness from actual life as it has to be lived to-day by ordinary men and women. The Christendom writers are, however, not alone in having found as yet no satisfying answer to the question how to make Christian action effective in the tangled and perverted world in which we live. If these essayists cannot give us all that we might wish for, that is no reason for disparaging the positive contribution which they make to our common thinking.

As Canon Widdrington tells us, the group originated in practical politics. It began as an active group of workers who found their way obstructed by new intellectual problems insoluble on the principles accepted by their contemporaries. They were driven to the conclusion that Christian action, if it was to be more than improvization, must be based on fully thought out theological and sociological foundations. The primary concern of the writers in this volume is with the question of what we *believe*—not only about society as a whole, but about particular aspects of its life, such as the meaning of nationality, the nature of work, the significance of the machine, the place of agriculture and the planning of towns. The work they have done is preliminary to the next stage, at which one examines the actual political situation in order to discover what Christian action it demands.

The source of the prophetic note in the volume is that the writers have emancipated themselves from the vice of much Christian social thinking in merely reflecting in more high-sounding terms what is advocated by the most enlightened thought of the time. They have hammered out in the light of the Christian revelation clear criteria for Christian social action.

It is quite impossible within the limits of a Supplement even to indicate the contents of a volume such as this, much less to offer a balanced critical estimate of them. All we can do is to point to some of the fundamental beliefs determining Christian social action which the writers convincingly propound and interpret. It is these ultimate convictions, which govern our fundamental attitudes and become so much part of ourselves that we are often scarcely conscious of them, that are in the long run decisive in shaping social action.



## MAN'S TRANSCENDENT END

One of the first merits of this volume is that it helps towards a deeper understanding of the ways in which belief in God affects decisions in the secular sphere. When we speak of God, the question is not whether we are justified in clinging to some vague theism, deriving from it personal solace and support, but whether belief in God is a significant factor in social and political decision. The Christian answer is that since God is the author and determiner of man's existence, the only social and political action that can achieve its true end is that which, whether the actors are conscious of it or not, is in accordance with His will.

A decisive fact in the Christian attitude towards the concerns of this temporal life is the knowledge that the individual person who participates in its activities is not completely determined in his purposes and actions by the natural and historical setting in which he has to act. These purposes and actions—again, whether he knows it or not—are continually being moulded by his relation to God. Man acts in society with a status not given by society. In the choices of those who know this, the most important factor is one which is lacking in the decisions of those who are guided solely by changing discernments of meaning and value in the world around them.

The Christian believes, moreover, that God, in sending His Son into the world, is reaching out towards us, and towards our fellow-men through us. Our unending task is not to shape the world according to our own ideas, but to respond to the unceasing pressure on us of God's initiative and purpose. It is this confidence in God, as Mr. Davey maintains in the opening essay, that is the perennial source of Christian hope. In spite of multiplying disappointments and frustrations and widening conflicts we know that the whole of human life in all its ranges and activities stands under the eternal promise of God, and that those who are working for ends which He has appointed need never lose heart. Perhaps there is no point to which a prophetic ministry needs more to be directed than to re-establishing in men's minds the true ground of confidence and hope.

## MAN'S UNIQUE PLACE IN CREATION

A second unifying belief in these essays is a clear and firm conviction regarding the nature of man. To the question, What is man? secular thought has no real answer. Until that question has been faced and answered, as Canon Widdrington rightly says, no true or enduring civilization can be built.

Liberal thought has clung tenaciously to the doctrine of the rights of the individual over against society. It has strongly maintained that the State exists for the good of the individual, not

the individual for the State. But while large sections of enlightened opinion held this doctrine in politics, in their general thinking men had surrendered themselves to a view of reality in which man is regarded merely as an incident in the process of becoming and the person becomes submerged in the flux of things. The liberal claim for the rights of the individual has lost its support in a fundamental conviction about the essential nature of man. That is why it has been unable to withstand the powerful revulsion in favour of the over-riding claims of society.

The very basis of recovery is a return to the belief that man has a unique place in the order of created being. He is neither a god—the lord and master of the universe, free to shape it as he will—nor simply an element in the process of becoming. He is at once a created and dependent being and a responsible person, lifted above the flux of things and given a status and dignity by his relation to God. It is the constant reference to this essential truth that gives to this volume its importance, and that should commend its conclusions to the consideration not only of Christians, but of all who believe that man has a real structure and who have some understanding of the permanent needs of men through all phases and periods.

## A NATURAL ORDER

The contribution which provides the foundation and setting for the rest is a powerful essay by Canon V. A. Demant on "The Idea of a Natural Order." In this the aim of the volume is stated to be to depict a society which can deserve the name of "Christendom," and which the writers believe it is historically possible to bring about. It will not be a society in which everyone is a convinced and practising Christian, though it will necessarily have in it a strong nucleus of people who are learning through the gift of God's grace to know what the Kingdom of God means.

The task attempted, therefore, is to draw the outlines of a social order in which the conscious leadership would be guided by an understanding of the essential nature of the human being. In this task the help of all who feel, clearly or dimly, the truth of man's unique situation can reasonably be expected. The writers presuppose the possibility of Christian and non-Christian co-operation in working for a society which will reflect the essential nature of man better than any recent period in the west.

If man is a free spirit open to God, and consequently a channel for the free creative activity of God, this central fact of his existence determines the character of his activity in all social spheres. All other levels of human existence derive their significance from this central fact and are seen in their true proportions in relation to it.



Consequently, when any one of these different levels—economics, politics, culture or even the family—is given a place which it is not entitled to claim, or usurps a supremacy which belongs to God alone, the natural order is violated. It is only the centring of life in God and the holding each of these various departments of life in its true subordination that can prevent a disastrous conflict between the various purposes of life.

Very many who are not Christians, as well as Christians, believe in the priority of the person over the social process. The strength of Canon Demant's essay, however, lies in its demonstration that this priority cannot be realized by repeated assertions of its importance or urgent moral exhortations to give effect to it. The dignity and worth of the person can find fulfilment only within the whole series of relations that make up a true natural order. Nothing is more deserving of our attention than the emphasis that is here laid on the insufficiency of moral aims by themselves. If they are to become effective two conditions must be fulfilled. First, they must have support in metaphysical certainty or dogma. Secondly, the emotional and cultural forces of society must be working in the main in the same direction, and not contrary to them.

## THE SOCIETY OF THE MACHINE AGE

The relation of these fundamental beliefs to our modern technical civilization is the subject of one of the most striking essays in the volume, by Mr. Philip Mairet. The coming of the machine has magnified man's faculty for producing things in an almost miraculous degree. Mankind has surrendered itself to the intoxicating influence of the new powers at its disposal. It has unthinkingly assumed that the happiness of man consists in the *quantity* of goods at his command and has forgotten that his wealth and welfare are no less dependent on the balance and proportion of the goods which he enjoys. The results of power-production have been so astonishing and exciting that a disproportionate amount of human energy and ambition have been diverted to its pursuit, while other functions, no less valuable or necessary to life, but less patient of stimulation by mechanical power, have been unduly neglected. Modern society has become disbalanced, and our most urgent task is to restore the true balance of human life.

If modern civilization based on the machine is to survive, it must be sustained by a faith and conviction that it contributes to the essential meaning of human life, and that at the heart of it there is a power to evoke man's love. Perhaps, Mr. Mairet suggests, such a faith has been present all the time, however little recognized, and in spite of all the hideous perversions of human life which characterize our civilization. Could that civilization have come

into existence "unless men had felt, even if vaguely, dimly and uncertainly, that our society is doing something *great* in this age of progress, and that the technical miracles were themselves, in some sort, a collective achievement worthy of human life and love? Perhaps even the machine workers have more than half believed that in this phase of history men were doing what men are for—not indeed doing it well enough, nor unmixed with baser purposes, yet on the whole giving expression to something inherent in man and his world position—fulfilling a possibility that ought to be fulfilled."

Our fault has lain in forgetting that this transfiguration of the material world is a spiritual achievement, "inspired, in all its most creative moments, by a wonder akin to worship not only of the powers within the human intellect, but also of the infinity and variety of the created universe." We have allowed to slip from us that love of the creation which was the outstanding characteristic of the pioneers of the scientific movement. The deepest cause of the dilemma of a technical civilization is "its ignorance of what to do with its brilliant abilities. For in the first and last analysis there is nothing to do with them, except to dedicate them to the Source whence they come." Only through religion can we find our way back to a genuine culture.

It would leave an entirely mistaken impression if what has been said were taken to mean that the volume is concerned solely with theological foundations. A serious attempt is made in a number of the essays to work out their sociological implications. Particular mention may be made of two papers by the late Miss Ruth Kenyon in which, in the light of ripe practical experience, she deals with "The Town in To-morrow's Christendom," and "The Scope and Limits of State Initiative," and of a contribution of outstanding interest by T. M. Heron, an industrialist of long experience, in which he attempts to formulate a Christian doctrine of work.

The Christendom Group have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the common task which confronts all Christians to-day. How to express the insights that they have gained in concrete social and political action in our present society is a further chapter.

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